

# Voices of dissent: unpacking Vietnamese international student experience

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine Vietnamese international students' experiences with the campus learning environment by analysing differences in staff and student perceptions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Two focus groups ( $n = 12$ ) and ten in-depth interviews were conducted with Vietnamese students and four in-depth interviews with the university staff (totalling 26).

**Findings** – The findings show a greater divergence of views between students and staff on teaching and learning than English language proficiency and student support services. These key differences were influenced by students' prior expectations of their learning environment in Vietnam.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study is limited to one group of international students and to one Australian university.

**Practical implications** – The lecturers/administrators must have a good understanding of international students' learning backgrounds and expectations to enhance their positive experience; appropriate teaching skills and practices are essential for teachers to meet the current needs of students. More effective training for international students to understand the multicultural nature of Australia is also essential.

**Originality/value** – This study contributes to the literature by identifying the experience of Vietnamese international students in a western university, which is, a relatively under-researched nationality compared to other Asian nationalities such as Chinese and Indian.

**Keywords** Higher education, Student experience, International student, Staff perception, Vietnamese

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

This paper is based on a study located within an Australian university and focusses on the experience of Vietnamese international students, a relatively under-researched nationality compared to other Asian nationalities, such as Chinese or Indian international students. This study examines key issues influencing the student experience by comparing student and staff perceptions. This study answers the following research question:

*RQ1.* What differences exist in student and staff perceptions of the key issues shaping the experience of Vietnamese international students?

Australia attracts more than 400,000 international students, mainly from the Asia Pacific region (Australian Education International, 2014), and has been a leading study destination



for Vietnamese students for the past decade. More than 23,000 Vietnamese students are currently enrolled in Australian educational institutions and an estimated 10,000 students undertake Australian courses using off-shore programmes in Vietnam (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2011). Additionally, the value of Australian exports of educational services to Vietnam doubled from \$400 million to \$800 million between the years 2007/2008 and 2009/2010, making it a growing market for Australia. With the growth of the Vietnamese economy, more students will be studying overseas and more research is therefore needed in this area. From an economic and strategic perspective, Vietnam is an increasingly important education market for Australia.

The term “student experience” relates to how a student perceives and evaluates student life within a learning institution. It encompasses the perceptions of students using both academic (i.e. teaching and learning (T&L) and non-academic support services (i.e. course advisors and counsellors). The latter are provided by the institution to help students navigate their educational pursuits (Arambewela, 2009). In the current globalised higher education (HE) market, student experience is a heavily contested topic. The creation of a global HE market is motivated primarily by economic and political interests and has encouraged universities to embrace the market place and become customer focussed (Currie, 1998; Mazzarol, *et al.*, 2003). That is, universities now function as business enterprises. This process is supported by a neo-liberal ideology, which has become the dominant political paradigm over the last three decades of the twentieth century (Le, 2014; Yang, 2003). Universities are driven by “student consumerism” and students are treated as customers whose satisfaction with the services offered is paramount to the viability of universities (Cain and Hewitt, 2004).

The pressure for increasing student enrolments and decreasing student attrition has placed greater emphasis on a positive student experience. Therefore, it has become an area of considerable interest and attention among researchers, administrators and other stakeholders in HE systems around the world (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). Not surprisingly, many university mission statements, policies and strategies as well as national policy frameworks now include the strategic significance of the student experience. Universities’ adoption of the student-as-customer concept is recommended to improve service quality provided to students (i.e. staff proficiencies, teaching facilities and support services) (Watjatrakul, 2014).

In a study of the international student experience in a British university, Arambewela and Maringe (2012) identified a number of gaps in the perceptions of staff and students as to how the university can support the learning environment of international students. These included quality of education and future career prospects; quality, access to and relevance of student support services; application of English language training provided for academic success; and cultural integration. Students’ perceptions of university performance in support services stem from their attitudes, either positive or negative (Keaveney, 1995), which are based on the extent to which student expectations match the actual delivery of the services. Negative attitudes can lead to student dissatisfaction, complaints, decreasing loyalty and negative word-of-mouth promotion (Kau and Loh, 2006).

The current study is significant because it attempts a comparative analysis of student and staff perceptions of the student experience. A comparative perspective provides greater insight into the student experience, and helps establish whether students and staff share common perceptions about the value and effectiveness of the university learning environment for enhancing student experience. This paper argues that if staff and students hold similar views, the chances of finding common solutions to issues are greater; alternatively, if there is a great divergence in views, the solutions and university support systems in place are likely to not deliver the expected outcomes in resolving challenges that students face. It also argues that the experiences of Vietnamese international students in T&L are a result of differences between students’ expectations, and their actual experience

at the university. This study contributes to the literature by identifying the experience of Vietnamese international students in a western university, which is relatively under-researched. It elaborates on the mismatch between Vietnamese student and staff expectations of what the institution could or should offer international students.

### Theoretical perspectives

From a theoretical perspective, a large body of the extant literature on student experience focusses on the influence of lower English language competency in international students from Asia and the negative outcomes stemming from difficulties with communication (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Wearing *et al.*, 2015). A cultural deficit approach has dominated the discourse on teaching, which assumes the learning experiences of Asian students is reproductive, surface, teacher-centred and inappropriate in the western education context (Troyna, 1988). A major criticism is that the cultural deficit approach misrepresents the learning backgrounds of international students, incorrectly treating all international students from Asia as a homogeneous group and ignoring differences among individual students and the education systems in different Asian countries (Chalmers and Volet, 1997). In contrast, and according to the cultural proficiency approach, Biggs (1996) views the learning styles of Asian international students as not always having produced negative outcomes. Their academic performances are comparable or sometimes better than those of domestic students or international students from western countries (Rienties *et al.*, 2012). The problem with this discourse is a lack of understanding about the learning background, expectations and aspirations of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) international students, making it difficult for academics and university administrators to implement successful strategies to enhance student experience.

As indicated, student experience is a broad term that encompasses all aspects of the engagement of students with HE. The reasoning behind the idea is that when students' experience of HE is positive, their satisfaction will accordingly be high (Aldridge and Rowley, 1998; Havis and Voyer, 2000). The gap in student expectations and the actual performance of the university services as perceived by students, is considered as the main driver of the level of satisfaction. This study draws on the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980) as its theoretical framework. It postulates that customer satisfaction is related to the size and direction of disconfirmation, which is defined as the difference between an individual's pre-purchase (pre-choice) expectations (or some other comparative standard) and the post-purchase (post-choice) performance of the product or service as perceived by the customer (Anderson, 1973; Oliver, 1980). If expectations are met or exceeded, the customer is satisfied. Dissatisfaction results when perceived performance falls below expectations. The themes captured in the study are student reflections of how far their expectations have been met by the university through the delivery of services.

In the case of Vietnam, the country is strongly influenced by Confucian culture (Nguyen *et al.*, 2006). Confucius doctrine emphasises the idea of maintaining harmonisation. Societal stability is based on unequal or hierarchical relationships between teacher and students. Students expect teachers not only to provide knowledge but also to be their models of correct behaviour (Scollon and Scollon, 1994). The first criterion for a teacher in Vietnam is to be of "good moral quality, ethically and ideologically" (Nguyen *et al.*, 2006), which means students have a high expectation on the teachers' knowledge and ability.

### Methods

A qualitative methodology was chosen in preference to a statistical analysis to gain insights into student and staff narratives on Vietnamese students' experiences – that is, a qualitative approach recognises the depth of human experiences, feelings and perspectives (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995). Two methods of data collections were employed in this study: focus group (FG)

and in-depth interview. We chose these methods because they are tailored to determine the perspectives, perceptions and feelings of the informants (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995). The advantage of the FG method was that it enabled us to capture the collective view of the groups while interviewing reflected individuals' opinions/experiences and their own narratives. Using FGs and interviews enabled us to triangulate these two data sources, which enhanced the validity of the data (Yardley, 2008). Specifically, we compared and contrasted: student interviews and student FGs and student interviews/student FGs and staff interviews. We saw the similarities and discrepancies in the responses among students and among staff and students as the way to identify the gap in their experiences. The analysis guided our interpretation of the findings.

Semi-structured questions were used in the FGs and in the in-depth interviews. The questions covered demographic information of the students, their prior and current studies, expectations and their experience in relation to T&L, university support services and other facilities on campus. In-depth interviews with semi-structured questions were employed in previous student related studies (e.g. Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Wearing *et al.*, 2015). The FG method has also been adopted by prior studies (e.g. Maunder *et al.*, 2013; Maringe and Carter, 2007).

### *Participants*

We used purposive sampling (Neuman, 2006) to recruit participants with the assistance of the International Office of the university and a research assistant. We sent an e-mail inviting all Vietnamese students enrolled in the university to participate. Students were chosen on the basis that they were enrolled in a degree at the university for at least six months so that they were able to provide feedback on their experience of the learning environment. Staff members (i.e. lecturer, student advisor and administrator) were purposely chosen on the basis of their experience interacting with Vietnamese international students. Altogether we conducted two FGs ( $n = 12$ ) and ten in-depth interviews with Vietnamese students and four in-depth interviews with the university staff (totalling 26). All interviews and FGs were in English except for one student interview, which was conducted in Vietnamese at the request of the participant.

### *Data analysis*

Data from interviews and FGs were transcribed verbatim into written English. The transcribed data were then thematically analysed (Miles and Huberman, 1994), which involved two researchers coding the transcripts. We developed a set of codes, which aligned with the literature and the data, and then analysed and compared our coding to ensure consistency and relevance with the codes' definitions. Codes with similar characteristics were grouped into themes. The data analysis was an ongoing process in which we critically reviewed the interpretation of the codes and themes.

To guide the coding process, we consistently asked several questions adapted from Liamputtong and Serry (2013). For examples: first, definition of the situation: how individuals understand, perceive, or define the topics that the study focussed on; second, perspectives: ways of thinking about the things that are shared by the participants; third, activities: frequently occurring types of behaviour and experience; fourth, actions: what participants do or say; fifth, consequences: types of consequences of the actions or behaviour and finally, strategies: ways of achieving things: participant's strategies, methods or techniques for meeting their need. We used Oliver's (1980) the expectancy-disconfirmation theory to guide our analysis in relation to the gap between students' expectation and their experiences and between students' and staff's view. Table I shows the example of the data analysis process.

Step 1: example quotes	Step 2: codes	Step 3: subcategories	Step 4: categories	Step 5: theme
Because they don't self-identify and because they're often shy about asking questions, they don't want to show that they don't understand something, it's that initial getting through to them that we're here to help, that they need to be able to say I don't understand so that I can go through it again and as many times as it takes, but unless they let me know that they're struggling I can't always pick it up [...] And in the past I had deliberately not asked them in the whole class because I don't want to single them out, I don't want them to feel as if they're being stigmatised right from the beginning (Staff A)	Students' learning issues Strategies to managing students' learning issues	Staff's expectation from the students Challenging aspect of teaching	Staff perceptions of student's learning style	Teaching and learning
It's like when you put the question on Blackboard to ask for the assignment or the things that you do not understand clearly; they answered like "okay, you need to study by yourself". It's like they are not interested in answering questions (VS8)	Student's learning strategies Dissatisfaction with the staff's responses	Student's expectation from the staff Student's learning experiences	Student's perceptions of staff's teaching style	

**Table I.**  
Examples of the data analysis process

**Note:** Excerpts from the interviews with two participants

## Findings

The differences reflected the mismatch between staff and student perceptions of the learning environment, which is a result of the discrepancy between expectations and reality. Three major themes are discussed below.

### T&L

Results indicate substantial differences in student and staff perceptions of T&L. Students expected teachers to provide answers to all the questions, while teachers expected to act as facilitators of independent and active learning, rather than to spoon-feed students. The staff felt students were task orientated but lacked analytical thinking and continuous engagement with learning activities, including participation in class discussions. Further, students did not communicate their learning difficulties with staff, who remained unclear if the student required assistance or not. For example, as one staff member said:

Because they don't self-identify and because they're often shy about asking questions, they don't want to show that they don't understand something, it's that initial getting through to them that we're here to help, that they need to be able to say I don't understand so that I can go through it again and as many times as it takes [...] (Staff A).

Another academic staff member recounted his efforts to overcome the problem of lack of engagement, explaining why Vietnamese students did not actively integrate with other groups:

[...] I think that successful international students are those that don't sit within their ethnic groups, [...] I taught a unit myself in international finance and I had groups and the groups had to be multi ethnic groups so it forced them to mix with others, I found Vietnamese students in particular hold back in the groups until the groups have all been organised and there are only four Vietnamese students left (Staff R).

These comments highlight the effects of cultural differences on T&L. They also underline the need for teachers to develop a greater understanding of cultural differences among international students and find ways to accommodate different students' learning needs and styles.

Different from the staff's view, the students thought some academics did not provide adequate support. While students were more comfortable with online communication with teachers than face-to-face encounters, the efforts made by the university to encourage online learning have fallen short of student expectations, specifically in terms of its efficacy. A student indicated:

[...] I was done a test online, which had all the multiple choice questions. Then, when the result released, it wasn't really good. When I asked them "is that any mistake from my answer?" He replied to me in really, really rude way: "I had a review on your mark. It was 1.43 over 1.95. It was weird, but that's it" [...] I'm really disappointed about that. Then, I asked: "would you please at least show me where I was wrong?" and he said "the system wasn't set for this purpose" (VS5).

Students and staff held contrary views about the backgrounds of the teaching staff and their performance. Students expressed dissatisfaction with the presence of a high number of lecturers and tutors from CALD backgrounds. They expected to learn from "Aussie teachers" but in an "Asianised" environment, contrary to their purpose of studying in Australia. A majority of the participants raised the concern that they could not understand the accent of the Asian teachers (especially those from Indian and Chinese backgrounds) and some chose to attend classes with Australian teachers or decided not to attend the class at all. As some indicated:

The thing is difficult to learn when I was allocated in the tutorials that the teachers are from India and China, I don't know. And I find really hard to understand what they say, so I couldn't make the question for them. Even I make the question, when they answer me; I couldn't understand what they say [...] Actually, I tried to choose the Aussie one [...] (VS8).

This university has lots of Asian teachers [...] all Indian [...] the way of teaching is different. We have to adapt to their teaching, different teachers from different countries and they have a different style of teaching [...] (VS10).

Staff nevertheless maintained that having academics of different backgrounds and ethnicities is a reflection of the Australian multicultural population and workforce, and therefore, the educational institution. One staff member reiterated this message:

I've had students complain that a lecturer isn't very experienced, and I say to them, well you're going to find that you're not going to get a job because someone says that you're not experienced, [...] so also I just feel that also with international students, it's a bit of a racism thing as well, [...] The thing is that our university and my school in particular have a staff from twenty to twenty-five different countries, they speak English with a variety of accents, and students do have some problems with those accents [...] and this is what working in Australia is [...] and if they were to work within a global context [...] they need to have some patience with the language (Staff R).

The above indicates that international students need a greater understanding and appreciation of the importance of cultural diversity and equity and the value of language diversity in Australia. Language and culture are essential to any process of T&L. International education involves not merely one language and culture but is a negotiation between at least two (Crichton and Scarino, 2007).

Students expect teachers to be experts in their respective disciplines. They also expect teachers to be engaging and supportive with their learning and pastoral needs. However, students feel that the lecturers are often unprepared for their lectures, making them unmotivated to attend classes. Students wanted the lectures to be presented in a more engaging way. The following comments from students indicate their disappointment:

Like few of my tutors, just read again from the tutorial slides and I found not interested in that because we can read them at home, we don't need to come to the class and listen again [...] I experienced once before that I got a new Chinese lecturer [...] and she just spend about 15 minutes doing one slide without much information (FG1, Hg).

[...] quite honestly, some of the lecturer's, they don't really care where you are as in standards wise, so they presume you already do know that so, just like everyone else [...] (FG2, N).

The above comments add credibility to the views expressed by the staff: that Vietnamese students depend on teachers for obtaining learning outcomes and make little attempt to become independent learners.

Apart from the cultural implications related to T&L, the staff expressed the opinion that the priority of most international students is to gain Australian permanent residency (PR). As a result, the staff argued, their educational pursuits are neglected as one staff explained:

There are some students here who are really not interested in their education. They're just here for other reasons, but the majority of the international students are and they have such high expectations from their families back home that there are real pressures on them and that's what troubles me so much with them, that often you don't get to help them until it's too late and should they fail there are all sorts of issues with parents, with Visas [...] (Staff A).

Staff J. also shared a similar view: "I think they love Australia. I must admit, a lot of the students would like to have PR".

The above findings highlight the mismatch between student and staff views about T&L. These differences can be attributed to the disconnect between students' expectations and reality.

### *English language proficiency*

A consistent view is found among staff and students with regard to language barriers. A majority of Vietnamese students stated that language is a key challenge, which caused greatest concern for them while studying at an Australian university. A lack of proficiency in English acted as a barrier to choosing the right course or to following lectures and instructions from lecturers. Most students felt more confident choosing courses that required less writing, like accounting and finance as one student said:

I was worried about my English because it wasn't good at first. Sometimes, when I talked to some one, I can't get what they want to say [...] I felt hard to express my thought to others [...]. The other thing is the Australian sometimes uses their slang and own language, and that is really hard for me to understand [...] what they are talking about (VS6).

Other students felt the opportunity to improve their English was limited because they continued to interact with mainly Vietnamese students: "because we are in Vietnamese association, so sometimes we speak English, but we speak Vietnamese all the time". (VS8). The findings infer that Vietnamese students remained in their comfort zones instead of actively mixing with other cultures and/or local students. Arguably, international students in general need to make efforts to make friends with local students, and more so than local students.

Staff echoed the same sentiments by acknowledging students' difficulties with English language. As they stated: "Language is not easy [...] coming into the university they have to lift their language from the focus on fact to the focus on opinion and shades of meaning, broaden their English vocabulary [...]" (Staff V); "I think after being in Vietnam recently I think probably English language is a significant challenge for Vietnamese students" (Staff R).

While students and staff shared similar views on English language proficiency, we found differences of opinion on how students should overcome language challenges. Staff indicated that a lack of proactive integration with local students is a major barrier to Vietnamese students' improving their English in comparison with other groups such as Indian and Sri Lankan students:

I think that Vietnamese students probably have a bit more of a problem than perhaps say the students from China or other cultures, Chinese students because there's a large number of them tend to sit together a bit, tend to work together, the Indian students tend to be willing to move and

the Sri Lankan students, but Vietnamese probably sit a little bit together because there's been a strike of things between Vietnam and China that we don't understand fully too (Staff R).

Further, non-attendance at lectures or other support services restrained their opportunities to make friends with Australian students and for staff to assist them. Lack of confidence or motivation to mix with other students was also considered an issue with Vietnamese students as compared with Chinese:

We have a large number of international students in our undergraduate program from a mix of countries who don't seem to take the opportunities, who don't attend, who keep within their own ethnic groups and to be honest I'm not sure what their purpose in what they're doing and also they're very difficult to contact and find out [...] (Staff R).

Students partially agreed that they failed to interact with other student groups. However, their reasons for failing appear to be cultural, including feeling shy:

Perhaps I didn't spend much time with other friends, Western friends. I'm so worried about my listening. It's hard to understand what they're saying [...] I'm only nervous if the teacher didn't understand what I'm saying (VS10).

Their reasons also related to cultural barriers: "I felt that there is a big wall between international students and local students that separates them from each other" (VS5).

The findings from this theme imply that initially the students needed greater cultural understanding, encouragement and patience from staff and local students to overcome their anxieties with using the English language. Also, while the students managed to adapt to their new studying environment, they needed to be more proactive in developing their networks with local students.

### *Support services and social activities on campus*

In comparison to T&L, students had a much more positive experience with support services, including language support, career skills and student advisory services. The distinguishing theme of our findings is that while some of the students were happy with the support services they used at the university, others were either unaware or did not use these services. Those who used support services found it a positive experience, as the following comments from students confirmed:

The course advisor, when I don't know what I should study in my majors [...] I come there and ask them to check what I need to study. They have shown me what subjects I should study for this semester and next semester. They asked me what I would want to do in the future, and then they recommended me what I should study. It's really a good point for me (VS8).

The peer support program was mentioned positively in both FGs: "I really like it though because they're students as well so they know what you need, they have experience closer to you, so they teach you what you mainly need to focus on for the exams" (FG2, V).

Not all students were aware of the university support services or how to access them, as one said: "I haven't interacted with them, so I have no idea [...]. No, I haven't used the Skill Development programs" (VS7).

Staff believed that most students did not make use of the support services on campus and this was a barrier to enhancing the student experience.

We provide an academic skills program, we provide language and literacy and we provide advice on how to prepare assignments and things like this, they're provided by the university on a generic basis while students are directed to those things, but most students don't take it up. They only take it up when they have a meeting and there's some issue in regards to their progression and it's suggested that they do this or else they will be excluded (Staff R).



The findings suggest that more effective communication programmes by the university is necessary to create a greater awareness of support programmes and motivate students to use them.

### Discussion and implications

This study explores the differences between student and staff perceptions of the key issues shaping the experience of Vietnamese international students. The analysis of student and staff perceptions provides a greater understanding and appreciation of the factors contributing to positive and negative student experiences and the resulting strategic implications for universities.

The first major finding is that the difference of views between students and staff on T&L was greater than their views on English language proficiency or student support services. Students were disappointed that they were unable to experience a mono-cultural Australian environment and were critical of the teaching practices of the (multicultural) academics. Staff thought students held a poor understanding of multicultural Australia and felt that greater social integration with the life of the university would help overcome such attitudes. Chalmers and Volet (1997) indicate that Asian international students have difficulties in adapting to the Australian accent. Instead, Vietnamese students in our study were even more distressed by the number and accents of CALD teachers, a scenario that was contrary to their expectations of the Australian university, resulting their low satisfaction of teaching quality. Many Australian universities consider it important to promote global citizenship among students, an attribute not openly embraced by many students in our study. Fernandes *et al.* (2013) found the quality of teaching and teachers significantly impacts on student satisfaction. This finding can be explained by the Confucianism philosophy in Vietnam, in which teachers are expected to be a model of behaviour and knowledge (Scollon and Scollon, 1994). Moving forward, it is recommended that universities communicate the benefits (e.g. to develop skills in a global workplace) of teaching by multicultural staff to students. This will assist in reducing and addressing the expectations of the international students coming to Australia.

Consistent with previous studies, we identified the challenges related to students' adapting to a new learning environment and diverse teaching styles. Grayson (2008) highlights remedial measures, such as: adequate teaching expertise; having knowledge of subject matter; being responsive to the class; caring about students in the class; having a sense of humour; being well organised. Clearly, knowledge ownership is changing: from teachers to combined expectations and an emphasis on the ownership of the learners. That is, knowledge has shifted from discovery to knowledge utilisation, application and mobilisation, as well as user's satisfaction (Lee, 2014). To manage student expectations, information resources are mandatory. They enable students to formulate realistic expectations and beliefs about the university (Maunder *et al.*, 2013). Once again the interplay between use of technological tools to deliver, and disseminate information to students is required. Using a combination of tools to teach (e.g. verbal, visual, recoding, online posts/resources) will enrich the students' learning experiences, irrespective of their preferred learning style. Availability and access to myriad of resources will also allow students to review materials in their own time, potentially making them more confident to ask questions in person, and/or online, further leading to improving their communication skills.

As a possible explanation for students' disappointment, we argue that prior learning and the cultural backgrounds of Vietnamese international students have majorly affected their expectation and learning experiences. Research supports this explanation: Hall (2008) indicates that Vietnam's education system, curriculum, language teaching methodology and classroom procedures are developed within the Vietnamese context, and cultural influences on educational outcomes are therefore prevalent. Further, an open market after the economic

reform in Vietnam has improved the education system and Vietnamese's quality of life (Le, 2004), leading to people's higher expectation on any service providers including overseas HE institutions. Oliver's (1980) expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm explains the difference between an individual's expectations and the actual performance/quality of the product or service. According to Oliver's theory, if customers' expectations are met or exceeded, they are satisfied. If perceived performance falls below expectations, dissatisfaction is resulted. The findings suggest that pre- and post-entry university communications have had a significant effect in shaping student expectations of university support services and subsequent experiences.

The second major finding is that students and staff shared the similar view on students' deficiencies in English and inactive interactions with others, which resulted in a lack of interactions between Vietnamese students and Australian students. But Vietnamese students made genuine efforts to improve their language proficiency despite staff criticisms of students' reluctance to use university resources and to seek assistance. Vietnamese students' effort to improve their English is supported by the cultural proficiency theoretical perspective (Biggs, 1996). Previous studies (Wearing *et al.*, 2015) have identified the common issues facing international students, such as English language proficiency and difficulty interacting with local culture and students. Adding to these issues, Crichton and Scarino (2007) explain that Australian students express an inadequate capacity to understand and manage their interactions in response to the linguistic and cultural expectations of CALD individuals, and this is due to being in their own language and culture. Accordingly, international students in general need to develop their English proficiency to learn in their new environment, rather than expecting local students to recognise their bilingual or multi-lingual repertoire. One could thus posit that the onus is back on the students to assimilate in the new environment and strive to interact with individuals from different backgrounds to develop their language skills. Sharing students' positive stories in induction programmes, marketing brochures and cultural events is also recommended.

Our third major finding is that staff and students shared similar views on the quality of the university support services. However, awareness and access to services were issues for some students while staff believe that students did not take advantages of the services. Previous research also revealed that unawareness of support services was a common issue for international students (Rohrlich, 1991). We add to the literature by identifying that students who used on-campus services often felt more included and satisfied with their overall experience. However, those who were unaware or did not use on-campus services struggled to adapt and were less satisfied with their overall experience. To increase students' awareness of support programmes, it is necessary to conduct induction programmes more frequently as transition is not limited to the initial induction period (Mauder *et al.*, 2013) and to initiate culturally responsive strategies and effective communication that motivates students to participate in the services.

This study provides practical implications for university to enhance their service quality for international students in general and for Vietnamese students in particular. First, the teachers and university administrators must have a good understanding of CALD students' learning backgrounds, expectations and aspirations to implement successful strategies that enhance students' experiences. This understanding helps manage student expectations through effective communication programmes that promote mutual agreement between students and teachers. As lecturers play a pivotal role in enhancing the international student experience, a closer interaction, open dialogue and the development of trust with students is vital (Tran, 2008). Building a relationship with students assists effective communication and connection between students and teachers, which provides opportunities to enrich T&L and understandings of the cultural nuances of each group of students. MacLean and Ransom (2006) highlight the importance of culturally aware teaching – that is, culturally inclusive classrooms could add

value to teaching in universities. The teachers, however, need to be provided with adequate support and staff development opportunities to enable them to fulfil these responsibilities. For example, the teachers would be aware of a lack of confidence in language and communication of Vietnamese students, as compared to Indian students so that they can use appropriate approaches for each cultural group. Employing a suite of teaching tools, as previously mentioned, will once again assist in addressing the different learning style of student cohorts.

Second, as effective teaching has been broadly emphasised as important to university teaching (Penny, 2003), appropriate teaching skills and practices are essential for teachers to meet the current needs of students (Devlin and Samarawickrema, 2010). The Australian Learning and Teaching Council developed five key criteria for determining excellence in university teaching, including: approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn; development of curricula and resources that reflect a command of the field; approaches to assessment and feedback that foster independent learning; respect and support for the development of students as individuals; and scholarly activities that influence and enhance learning and teaching (Devlin and Samarawickrema, 2010). Given the complexity of HE environment, academics should aim to address the above five criteria to enhance student satisfaction. Forming groups of students from different nationalities is one way this can be addressed in a resource efficient manner. Encouraging and motivating students to communicate (verbally in class or in face-to-face mode, and/or written form online) would also help to build skills across all cohorts of students. Allocating marks to such contribution, whilst a coerced way, will provide positive outcomes for the students in the long term.

Third, developing culturally responsive strategies that increase students' motivation to seek help and to integrate into local students' groups is essential. Cultural diversity training is required for both local and international students to optimise their interactions in a globally interconnected world. Universities should avoid a "one size fits all" strategy to support student transition. Enhancing cross-cultural understanding among students and teachers is also needed, which involves knowledge of different cultures and culturally appropriate communication skills. Effective communication helps students to be aware of university goals and student support services. It also helps staff appreciate the cultural differences and behaviours of students. More effective training for international students to understand the multicultural nature of Australia and the goal of global citizenship is also essential.

We recognise our study is limited to one group of international students and to one Australian university. However, the qualitative methodology used, the comparison between student and staff perceptions of student experiences, and the multiple methods of data collection contribute to the significance of the study and add value to the literature on international student experiences. Future research involving several universities and student groups is suggested to gain more insights into the interactions of international students and university staff.

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